

Working with Interpreters in Health Care Settings

Who can you use as an interpreter?

- + Trained bilingual staff
- + On-staff interpreters
- + Contract interpreters
- + Telephone interpreters
- + Trained volunteers

Who should not serve as a health interpreter?

- + Patients' family and friends
- + Children under 18 years old
- + Other patients and visitors
- + Untrained volunteers

What can trained interpreters do for me?

- + Reduce liability, help ensure appropriate utilization, increase client compliance and satisfaction with services
- + Provide a quality service
- + Assure effective communication between the client and provider
- + Support effective use of time during the clinical encounter
- + Improve outcomes

Cultural aspects of working with people from different cultures:

- + Remember lifelong experience
- + Avoid stereotyping
- + Try to assign same-sex health care providers/interpreters
- + Be familiar with folk illnesses
- + Work with family and community leaders
- + Consider the priorities for the patient
- + Learn about the beliefs and practices of the patient populations you serve

Tips for providers working with interpreters:

- + Introduce all participants
- + Position interpreter behind the patient or slightly off to the side; always focus on the patient
- + Speak directly to the client and use first person
- + Speak at a moderate pace and at normal volume
- + Pause often
- + Avoid using technical vocabulary
- + Allow the interpreter time to interpret; do not expect them to interpret while you are speaking
- + Ask the interpreter to interpret everything that is said exactly: add nothing, omit nothing and change nothing
- + Document the use of an interpreter by name, in the client chart